

“Remembering: I Stood with Abraham”

I stood with Abraham in his lonely vigil  
And read the destiny of my people in the stars.

I was with Isaac when he built the altar  
Where his faith and devotion were put to the test.

I stood with Jacob when he wrestled through the night  
With the angel of despair  
And won a blessing at the break of dawn.

With Joseph I dreamt of sheaves and stars  
And climbed the steps from the pit  
To the prince's throne.

I was with Moses, an alien prince among an alien people  
Unshod I stood with him before the vision in the wilderness,  
And from the fire I heard the Voice summoning him to service.

I was at Sinai and entered there the everlasting covenant  
Between my people and its God.  
I suffered and I hungered with them  
All the way across the wilderness to the Promised Land.

I was with Joshua at Jericho,  
And with Deborah by the waters of Megiddo  
When the stars in their courses  
Fought against Sisera.

I stood with the blind Samson in his agony,  
And I heard the wild cry of his desperate courage  
As he pulled the pillars over the Philistines.

I heard Samuel admonish his people to remain free,  
And not to reject God by enslaving themselves to a king.

I listened to the harp of David.  
And I saw him bow before the wrath of Nathan  
And before the truth of his accusation.

I heard Solomon in the Temple  
On the day he dedicated it as a House of Prayer for all peoples.  
And I learned from him  
Of a God whom heaven and the hosts of heaven cannot contain.

I was with the prophets  
Who came to destroy old worlds  
And build new ones.

I heard them lash out against injustice,  
I warmed at their compassion for the weak.  
From them I learned what a raging fire within one's soul  
An unfilled mandate from God can be.

I was with my people by the rivers of Babylon  
And I heard their oath:  
"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem."

I entered their makeshift synagogues in Babylon.  
And learned there that prayer and study  
Can be as beloved to God  
As the sacrifices of the priests of the Temple  
Or the songs of the Levites.

I returned with them from captivity  
And saw how a people can rebuild upon ruins.

I sat with the sages and the scribes  
Who patiently interpreted the word of God  
And slowly formed the Oral Law.

I moved among the mountains of Judea  
With the lionhearted sons of Mattathias.

I saw the miracle of the single cruse of oil  
That illuminated the Temple of the Lord.

I was with Hillel when he summarized the whole Torah  
In the commitment to love your neighbor as yourself.

I was with Akiba  
When he inspired a revolution  
Defiled an empire, and died a martyr.

I wandered with my people into many lands  
Where the cross and the crescent reigned.  
I walked with them over all the highways of the world.

I was with them when they drank out of the bitter chalices  
Of pain, humiliation, cruelty and hatred.

I saw them stay sane in the midst of madness.  
I saw them stay civilized in the midst of brutality.  
I saw them lighting candles in the midst of darkness.

Then I saw the shackles fall from their limbs,  
I saw the radiance of their emancipated minds and hearts.  
I saw them enrich every land that gave them opportunity.

I was with them when they landed at Ellis Island,  
And fell in love with the land that stood for liberty.

Then I saw the night descend again.  
I saw them suffer as no people has ever suffered before.  
I saw them burned and gassed and tortured

Then, like a Phoenix I saw them rise again in the old land.  
I saw them begin a new life there,  
Based on the ancient teachings of justice and mercy.

I saw them nurture saplings in the wilderness,  
And I watched them make the desert bloom.

I was with them in the Six Day War.  
I stood by them when their hard-earned state  
Was in danger on Yom Kippur.  
I trembled when they trembled  
And I rejoiced when they rejoiced  
I was at the Wall.  
I was in the Sinai.  
I was on the Golan Heights.

Shall I leave them now?  
Can I part company with the immortal band who I love?  
They have become too dear and precious to me.

They are bone of my bone.  
Flesh of my flesh.  
Soul of my soul.

They are my people.  
Their quest is mine.

They will live within me.  
And I will live with them, forever.

Abba Hillel Silver (adapted)

Machzor Hadash  
Zikhronot readings, Musaf for Rosh Hashana